

WTA Finals

Monday, November 15, 2021

Guadalajara, Mexico

Maria Sakkari

Press Conference



M. SAKKARI/A. Sabalenka

7-6, 6-7, 6-3

THE MODERATOR: Maria, talk us through how you got through that match, kept coming back, your thoughts on the match, looking ahead to the semifinals.

MARIA SAKKARI: Yeah, I think it was a roller coaster match from both of us. I was up a break, then she was up a break. It was just a matter of who took the chances.

I think at the end I just played with my heart and fought well, just turned things around.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. She had you under quite a bit of pressure in your service games the first set, quite a few breakpoints in a row. You took the first set. Can you talk through what you tried to do to back her off to get a little bit more breathing room in your service games?

MARIA SAKKARI: Well, I think that it was my first night match and that played a huge role in my game of how the ball really felt. I only practiced once before the tournament at night, so it was kind of new for me.

I don't know, it was weird because Aryna, she's very long, she's very tall, it's tough to get serves through her. Once I got a pattern that worked well, I just kept doing what I felt was working. I just went for it.

Q. How does it feel to make the semifinals?

MARIA SAKKARI: It feels very nice. Obviously it's great. Obviously my season is not finished yet, but this tournament has been very successful after today's win. I'm just very, very happy that I still show good emotions on court, I still play with my heart even though it's been 11 months since we started this season. I'm just going to enjoy tomorrow's match.

Q. Do you feel like you're making progress or learning

how to find your way through these third sets? US Open against Bianca. What is the key for you coming through these types of matches that, as you said, are roller coasters?

MARIA SAKKARI: I keep saying the same thing, but it's just my fighting spirit and my belief. I really think that sometimes I deserve to win these matches because of how I approach them and how I play them.

How can I say? I'm getting used to them. This is how it's going to be from now on because if I want to play against these players and win, I'm not going to win 1-1. I know I'm going to have to take it to a third set most times and do something special to beat them.

Q. I think Aryna won the last four against you. How important was it to get the victory, make the rivalry more in your favor? What were you able to do differently tonight?

MARIA SAKKARI: Obviously last time we played was in Abu Dhabi this year. I think my level is different today than back then. Obviously she has been having a very good season.

I think I'm just closer to them now. My ranking shows that, my results shows that. It's just that I'm really getting closer to them. I proved to myself and everyone that I can beat them like I did today.

Q. How much does fitness have to do with it? We know you have a big fitness commitment. Were you tired in the third set? Do you sense her running out of gas and you're not?

MARIA SAKKARI: I always say that fitness is one of my strengths. I really play with that. I'm 10 centimeters shorter than her. I need to have something more than these players in order to compete against them.

I believe that fitness is one of my biggest strengths. It's something that makes a lot of players kind of like intimidated because of that. They know that I can last long. They know that once I step on the court, I can stay



there for three, four, five hours, as long as I have to.

Q. What are your thoughts on the fact that Anett will have an extra day compared to you who just battled for three hours?

MARIA SAKKARI: I mean, sometimes things don't go your way regarding rest and days off. I knew that it's going to be a very tough match for me today. I'm not going to have so much time to rest.

As I mentioned before, my fitness level is I believe one of the best on tour, without being arrogant, but I believe fitness is one of my strengths. I'll do everything to recover. If Anett is better tomorrow, it's too good. But I'll try, as I said, to recover and just take advantage of the good things I felt today on the court.

Q. When do you think you became aware that your fitness was an advantage? Is this something you've had since juniors, something you developed during the pros, genetic from your mom?

MARIA SAKKARI: Even as a kid I was a very strong kid. You could see running around I was different from the other girls. That's what my parents say. I was always defined. My muscles were always defined.

Just throughout these years working specifically with my fitness coach... It's just that I like it. I love to spend time in the gym, break records, if that's lifting more weights or running faster or doing exercises I couldn't do before a couple of months. I just feel like now it is one of my biggest strengths.

As I mentioned before, I consider myself one of fittest players on the tour. I always have that in my mind. That takes me far into a tournament, especially this year.

Q. Could you talk about Anett, your friendship, competitiveness on and off the court. For two young-ish players, you've played each other a lot. I know you're quite tight. I believe you were on FaceTime all the time during the lockdown in Melbourne.

MARIA SAKKARI: After 11 times playing each other, we are used to living that friendship outside of the court, just focusing on what we have to do. Obviously it's very even. She has been having unbelievable results and she really deserves it.

I don't know if you heard on court, but I told her in Moscow that I'm going to see her here. I'm very glad that she's here because she's a very nice person and she deserves it.

But it all comes down to obviously who plays a better match tomorrow. I'm going to fight for it, do whatever I can to advance to the final. I just really want to enjoy tomorrow's match because the atmosphere here is just unreal.

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